

In the Shadow of an Oak tree

A place to heal for women of Sarpol Zahab city

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Natural disasters are unpredictable, terrible events that can change people's lives in less than a minute, like the 7.3 earthquake that shook Western Iran in November 2017. Sarpol Zahab, a small Kurdish city sited near historic petroglyphs from 2300 BCE suffered the greatest damage and adversity in this earthquake.

Although men and women can have difficulties adjusting to new and harsh living conditions, the wounds of such a catastrophe can be healed through time if people feel that their physical and psychological needs are acknowledged and fulfilled.

But in this case, those women who lost the man of their family endured a particularly severe mental and physical distress. In the entrenched patriarchal social structure, women are always taught to be identified with a man, and not to consider their own needs or desires as a priority. So the earthquake not only took their loved ones away, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected, but also affected their perception of their identity and place in society.

As an architect and a woman raised in the same culture, my main challenge was to design a space where the women of this community could heal from their trauma. Working on the project, interviewing and reading various resources related to the feminine journey through life, and thinking of architecture as an essential means of conveying feelings, I concluded that what these women need the most is to have a peaceful place of respite, where they can gather, talk to each other, and share their stories.

The project is a community centre where these women can do different cultural activities, with a small guest house attached to it as an income resource for those who do not have a job. The project's main focus was to create a variety of healing spaces with different qualities where they can spend time together, reclaiming their identity and enjoying the region's breathtaking natural phenomena, including the mountains, the river, and the shade of a beautiful old oak tree.

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It would not have been possible to achieve my goal in writing this thesis without the support and assistance of the loving people around me, to only some of whom it is possible to give a particular mention here.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all women of my land, all Persian women, who fought with extreme hardships in their lives and stayed strong.

And above all is my beautiful mother, who has always been a role model to me in being an independent, devoted, and powerful woman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author's Declaration	iii
Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	ix
Table of Contents	x
List of Figures	xii
Opening Quote	xix
PROLOGUE	1
INTRODUCTION	3
Architecture Soul	4
THE CITY	5
Geography	5
Cityscape	7
History	9
Disasters	10
THE EARTHQUAKE	12
The City	12
The Women	14
THE WOMEN	17
Persian Culture	17
Persian History	18
Persian Architecture	21

THE CENTER	26
Concept.....	26
Site Location.....	27
Site Plan.....	30
Program.....	35
Building Material.....	47
CONCLUSION	49
PHOTOGRAPHY	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	58

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	November 2017, Sarpol Zahab city Accessed August 2, 2020. https://www.mashreghnews.ir	2
Figure 2	A traditional female bath Small museum on the history of Tbilisi, exhibiting a collection of artifacts and old photographs. <i>Mostafa Meraji</i> . Photograph. Accessed August 10, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org	4
Figure 3	Zagros Mountains, on the way to Sarpol Zahab city Photo: by Author	5
Figure 4	Geographical Features of the Sarpol Zahab City Diagram: by Author, using <i>satellite images</i> . Google Earth, Accessed October 5, 2019.	6
Figure 5	Kermanshah Province Photos: by Author	7
Figure 6	A part of the city skyline Diagram and Photo: by Author	6
Figure 7	Brick as the main construction material in Sarpol Zahab city Photo: by Author	8
Figure 8	Location of Anubanini Inscription Photo: by Author	9
Figure 9	Sarpol Mountain, 1920 Herzfeld, Ernst. Photograph. Accessed October 6, 2019. https://commons.wikimedia.org	9
Figure 10	Sarpol Mountain, 2020 Photo: by Author	9

Figure 11	Anubanini Rock Relief	10
	Nozad Tehrani, Koorosh. Photograph. Accessed October 6, 2019. https://commons.wikimedia.org	
Figure 12	Modern Drawing of the Relief	10
	Lendering, Jona. Author. Accessed October 21, 2019. https://commons.wikimedia.org	
Figure 13	Disaster's Timeline in Western Part of Iran in the last century	11
	Diagram: by author, using <i>Seismic Hazard Map of the Middle East</i> . D. Giardini, L. Danciu, M. Erdik, K. Sesetyan, M. Demircioglu, S. Akkar, L. Gülen and M. Zare (2016), doi:10.12686/a1.	
Figure 14	November 14th, 2017	12
	Hosseini, Mahmoud. Photograph. Accessed July 15, 2020. https://www.tasnimnews.com	
Figure 15	Different Stages in a Disaster	13
	Diagram and two bottom photos: by Author.	
	Vasigh Ansari, Alireza. Photograph. <i>A day after earthquake in Sarpol Zahab city</i> . Accessed October 5, 2019. https://www.tasnimnews.com	
	Rafiei Movahed, Mohammad. Photograph. <i>One month after earthquake</i> . Accessed October 7, 2019. https://www.tasnimnews.com	
Figure 16	A woman who lost the man of her family	14
	Abbasi, Mohammadreza. Photograph. <i>Shattered Lives Post-Kermanshah Earthquake</i> . Accessed October 7, 2019. https://www.mehrnews.com	
Figure 17	A woman who lost the man of her family	15
	Latifi Hosseini Nasab, Mohammad. Photograph. Accessed December 12, 2019. https://www.ilna.news	
Figure 18	A woman who lost the man of her family	15
	Accessed December 6, 2019. https://www.irna.ir	
Figure 19	A woman who lost the man of her family	16
	Latifi Hosseini Nasab, Mohammad. Photograph. Accessed December 12, 2019. https://www.ilna.news	

Figure 20	Perisan women's costume through time	18
	Giafferri, Paul Louis de, b. Author. <i>The history of the feminine costume of the world, from the year 5318 B.C. to our century</i> . (New York: Foreign Publications, 1926). Accessed May 13, 2020, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-history-of-the-feminine-costume-of-the-world-from-the-year-5318-bc#/?tab=about	
Figure 21	The tradition of telling stories in Persian culture	19
	Collage: by Author, using an illustration of "Yalda night". Accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/409263/Shab-e-Yalda-A-warm-welcome-to-winter-felicitous-farewell-to	
	Two images from <i>the story of Farhad and Shirin</i> . Khuchek, Ghulam Mirza. Author. Accessed February 9, 2020, http://mia.org.qa/en/qajar-women/qajar-shirin-farhad .	
Figure 22	Khosrow and Shirin by Nizami Ganjavi	20
	Miniature. Timurid Dynasty(1431). Origin. Accessed February 9, 2020, https://www.arthermitage.org/The-Khamsa-by-Nizami/Shirin-Examines-the-Portrait-of-Khusraw.html .	
Figure 23	Shahmaran Myth	20
	MikaelF. Author. Assecced August 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahmaran	
Figure 24	The traditional typology of Persian house	22
	Diagram: by Author	
Figure 25	The entrance in Persian house	23
	Diagram: by Author	
Figure 26	Fraction of a 3D model of the typical Persian house	23
	Khalegi, Maryam. Artist. <i>Persian House</i> . Accessed February 20, 2020, madmaraca.artstation.com .	
Figure 27	A beautiful door to an abondened Persian house	24
	Photo: by Author	
Figure 28	Kurdish women gathering	26
	Bahrami, Zhalah. Photograph. Accessed March 31, 2020, https://instagram.com/zhalah__bahrami?igshid=2e1f61yqabo0 .	

Figure 29	Site Location Drawing: by Author	27
Figure 30	The healing journey through the city Drawings: by Author	28
Figure 31	Concept Drawing Collage: by Author, using the “O Guiding Star” painting. Frashchian, Mahmoud. Painter. Accessed February 6, 2020, https://www.farshchianart.com .	29
Figure 32	Gathering around the oak tree Photograph. Accessed July 28, 2020, https://www.eligasht.com/Blog/travelguide .	30
Figure 33	Site Plan	31
Figure 34	Design Diagram	32
Figure 35	Ground Floor Plan	33
Figure 36	Second Floor Plan	34
Figure 37	The Healing Path Image: by Author	35
Figure 38	The bridge connecting two sides Image: by Author	36
Figure 39	Healing Space Image: by Author	37
Figure 40	The Healing Path rise up to the second floor Image: by Author	38
Figure 41	The Courtyard Image: by Author	38

Figure 42	Section E with the Reference Plan	39
Figure 43	Section A	40
Figure 44	Section B	41
Figure 45	Section C	42
Figure 46	Section D	43
Figure 47	Section F	44
Figure 48	Section G	45
Figure 49	East Elevation	46
Figure 50	Symmetry as an earthquake-resistant approach Taghipoor, Alireza. Author. Accessed August 10, 2020, https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/handle/10012/15115 .	47
Figure 51	Angle management as an earthquake-resistant approach Taghipoor, Alireza. Author. Accessed August 10, 2020, https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/handle/10012/15115 .	47
Figure 52	February 2018, Children of Sarpol Zahab Jannati, Iman. Photographer. Accessed February 10, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/imanjannati .	49
Figure 53	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake Photo: by Author	50
Figure 54	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	51
Figure 55	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	51
Figure 56	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	52
Figure 57	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	52

Figure 58	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	53
Figure 59	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	53
Figure 60	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	54
Figure 61	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	54
Figure 62	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	55
Figure 63	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	55
Figure 64	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	56
Figure 65	Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 Earthquake	56

*“Show your scars.
Show them your scars,
so they know it’s okay if they also have a few.
Show them your truth
So they can stop hiding their pain.
Share your stories
So they remember that wisdom can grow
from the places they once fell.
Healing comes from wholeness
Help them find theirs by standing in yours.
Share your stories and tell of your healing
You never know your moment of vulnerability
might help another soul free.”*

-Cristen Rodgers

PROLOGUE

Day 15 of December 2017, 5:30 in the morning, I am standing outside of my building waiting for the car to pick me up. We are a group of 4 photographers who decided to hit the road early in the morning as we knew it is a 6-hour road trip, and we wanted to get there in sunlight to be able to take some good photos and not miss one day.

It is cold and dark, but the only thing I could think about is our trip for three days. I know it is not going to be a smooth experience, especially for me, as an emotional person, but I have no idea how hard it can get. Holding my camera bag closer to me while shivering, not knowing if it is cold or the fear of the things that I expect to see or the excitement of the new photography experience. I can see the lights of the car coming...

It's 11 in the morning, and we are getting closer to our destination, and I can't be more amazed by the incredible nature of this region. It is my first time traveling to this province, Kermanshah province, in the western part of Iran, with the majority of Kurdish ethnic groups. Passing through mountains covered some parts in snow and some parts with oak trees, small villages shaped on hillsides and valleys, besides all historical sites and engravings showing the long history of this specific area.

12:30 pm, and here we are; Sarpol Zahab, a small city that before this happened, I didn't even know it existed. I wish I had visited here before November 12th, a month ago, when the 7.1 magnitude earthquake destroyed most parts of this city...

Driving through the main street, with all the white tents around the city, there are still people sitting on the ground. I can see a man walking around looking for something, and I'm not sure what exactly, but I can guess that he is looking for blankets, jackets, or anything that can make him and his family warm at night. Few children are running and playing, but I can see the fear in their faces. Just passed by a woman, got down on knees hugging something in her arms, crying... I'm thinking, how on earth I can hold my camera up, point it at them and take their photo? Photo of what? Of their pain and tears or their struggle to stay alive?

Day 20 of December, sitting at my desk, looking at the photos our group took during the trip. The experience was genuinely speechless. I learned many things on this trip, and one of them was that sometimes trying hard to help people in deep need is not necessarily useful, sometimes just sitting there and listening to them talking about their pains and concerns is just enough. But the most important I've learned was that women carry the pain for a longer time than other members of society. It's because they never find a time to mourn for their losses and agonies as they have to comfort their husbands, look after their children, and provide all the necessary things to keep their family alive. This lesson was like a curtain that fell in front of my eyes, and I could see the reality

more clearly; the situation with Kurdish women of Sarpol Zahab is not the story of those specific women in that particular city, it is the story of all Iranian women throughout Persian history...



Figure 1 November 2017, Sarpol Zahab city

Now, after almost 3 years, I look back at those days, aiming to make my promise come true. On December 20th, 2017, I decided to help all Iranian women in all different painful conditions with the one thing that I believe can make a huge difference, and that is architecture.

INTRODUCTION

If you visit a place after any kind of disaster, from the human-caused like a war to the natural ones like an earthquake, you can feel the unbearable sorrow. You can see it in the reflection of every broken piece of glass, you can hear it in the deafening silence, and you can even smell it in the dense air. But beyond all that, the one thing that you could look at and feel the same agony is by looking at people's faces; their eyes will tell you everything.

With every disaster comes a great deal of pain, which could heal through time, but what makes the healing more difficult for some people is post-disaster catastrophes. Women who lost the man of their family are the primary victims of such tragedies as being verbally and physically harassed.

Sarpol Zahab, a small city in the western part of Iran, is one of those cities where people and especially women, are still dealing with various post-disaster problems after almost two years after the 2017 earthquake. Most of these heroines never become brave enough to share their stories, and most of the time, choose to suffer in silence. As a Persian woman growing up in the same culture, my deepest sympathy lies with these wounded women, which triggered me to think of finding a solution to help them based on the studies of Persian women through the thousand years of Persian history.

The history shows that women were praised thousands of years ago in the Persian kingdom, and there were several goddesses, each representing a superior and symbolic characteristic. Various reasons have led to the current discriminatory laws and patriarchal behavior toward women since ancient times, and it has been a long time for women to deal with such attitudes. However, in the last 40-50 years, the patriarchal behaviors toward Persian women have not changed a lot, but the truth is that these days females are experiencing more mental issues and self-doubts than the past. So by looking up into cultural differences between old times and the contemporary society we live in, I realized that spending more time together sharing stories and problems was the primary key to women's better mental situation in the past. And what had provided this communal opportunity for the females was traditional Persian architecture, including the Persian house with its central courtyard and public communal spaces such as hammams.

*"The problem with you
Is the problem with me
The problem thinking we're so different
The problem is how to perceive..."*

-Anne Waldman, "Duality"



Figure 2 A traditional female bath

Architecture Soul

Through all numerous standpoints toward architectural design, I believe that architecture should be designed to help people in need, not just limited to their physical demands but also their psychological ones. The Human being spends most of his/her time indoors, so his/her mental condition somewhat depends on those spaces where different feelings can be conveyed based on the architecture of the space. Based on scientific researches, the physical capacities of a human body allow it to experience the self-heal by being exposed to affirmative and healing surroundings.¹

*“.... the building knows about time
knows about the time before and the time which might come
because every building has a soul...”²”*

-Peter Zumthor

By knowing the capabilities of an architectural space and studying Persian mythology for mystical symbols of healing and strength, I began by the invention of a program that does not exist in this region and started designing this community centre for the wounded women of Sarpol Zahab.

¹ Sternberg, Esther M. *Healing Spaces : the Science of Place and Well-Being* Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.

² Peter Zumthor, Interview by The National Gallery, Haldenstein, Switzerland, April 4, 2014.

THE CITY

Sarpol Zahab is a small historical city where the deadliest earthquake in a decade in Iran happened on November 12th, 2017. The population is 45,000 and the dominant ethnicity is Kurdish.

Geography

Sarpol Zahab is located in the west part of the Kermanshah province, one of the western Kurdish provinces of Iran. Ernst Herzfeld, the German archaeologist and Iranologist, called Kermanshah the “gateway to Asia” because of its location in western Iran and its access to Mesopotamia.³ In the background of the most landscape views of the province, the second most famous mountain range of the country called Zagros mountains can be glimpsed, often covered with oak forests.



Figure 3 Zagros Mountains, on the way to Sarpol Zahab city

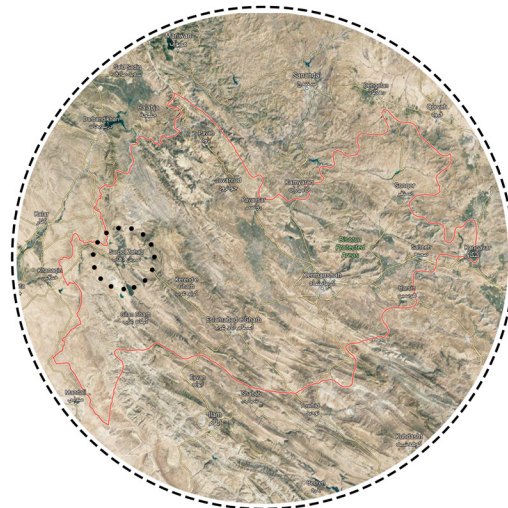
The main geographical feature of the town is a narrow mountain range with a gap in between where the river goes through. The urban civilization took shape around the river leaning on to the mountain rock, with a beautiful green landscape on both ends. Along with the landscape's breathtaking sights, the river also creates eye-catching sceneries passing through the city.

Sarpol Zahab has a mountainous and moderate climate. It rains most in winter and is moderately warm in summer. In the coldest days, the temperature could drop down to -4 °c and goes up to 40 °c in summer.

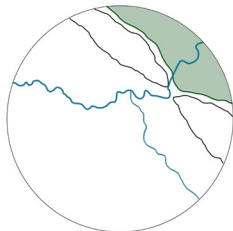
3 Hamzei, Fariborz and Papzan, Abdolhamid. [سرآغازی بر پژوهش‌های دانش بومی و فرهنگ شفاهی غرب ایران] Introduction to the Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Research in Western Iran. (Kermanshah: Razi University, 2006), 138.



IRAN
A country in western Asia, with 82 million inhabitants and the second largest country in the Middle East.



KERMANSHAH PROVINCE
One of the 31 provinces of Iran, located in western part of the country. The majority of people are Kurdish.



River created a gap in the rocks



The gap is the point where the city started growing



The city grew embracing the landscape in front of it



SARPOL ZAHAB

Figure 4 Geographical Features of the Sarpol Zahab City



Figure 5 Kermanshah Province. These two photos were taken within 24 hours from the same place, and it shows how the weather can change, and the temperature drops suddenly in this area.

Sarpol Zahab is a windy city which makes the weather colder in winter, and because of the building heights and the plains that surrounded the city, there is no barrier against the wind. There are just 16 days on average in a year that the city is covered in snow. The coldest month is January with the highest amount of snowfall⁴, and referring to the 2017 earthquake which happened in November, people of Sarpol Zahab experienced the first months after the earthquake in the coldest days of the year.

Cityscape



Figure 6 A part of the city skyline. Buildings with exposed brick in their facade are highlighted yellow.

4

“Monthly weather forecast and climate,Kermanshah, Iran.” Accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.weather-atlas.com/en/iran/kermanshah-climate>

In 85 percent of the built area, the city skyline doesn't exceed a four-story building, and there are six-story social housing complexes in that remaining 15 percent, which are dense in some specific areas. There is no arranged pattern identified in either vertical or horizontal urban design, but the recognizable schema is that the earliest settlement formed around the river and then started growing in various directions.

The primary building material is brick, and it is the only material used for residential buildings. There are two main reasons that the brick is prevalent in this area: first, installing a brick wall is usually straightforward, and people could do it themselves. People in small cities in Iran often prefer to build their homes with their own hands to preserve extra costs.

The second reason is that several brick kilns around the Kermanshah province provide an appropriate amount of brick for the whole area.



Figure 7 Brick as the main construction material in Sarpol Zahab city



Figure 9 Sarpol Mountain, 1920



Figure 10 Sarpol Mountain, 2020



Figure 8 Location of Anubanini Inscription

History

Sarpol Zahab has a rich history dating back to 4800 years ago, making it the eighth ancient city in the world, as stated by Sir Henry Rawlinson, a well-known orientalist. Proving the town's age is the rock relief called Anubanini, located on the southwest part of the Sarpol's Mountain rock (Figure 4).

The Anubanini petroglyph, which belongs to the Akkadian era dated back to 2300 BC, is assumed to be owned by the Lulubi tribe whose leader name was Anubanini.⁵

“In this rock relief, Anubanini, the king of the Lullubi, puts his foot on the chest of a captive. There are eight other captives, two of them kneeling behind the Lullubian equivalent of the Akkadian goddess Ishtar (recognizable by the four pairs of horns on her headdress and the weapons over her

5 Potts, D. T. *The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian State*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 318. ISBN 9780521564960.



Figure 11 Anubanini Rock Relief



Figure 12 Modern Drawing of the Relief

shoulders) and six of them standing in a lower row at the bottom of the rock relief.”⁶

Disasters

Western parts of Iran, including Kermanshah province, were exposed to various earthquakes in the last century, and the reason is the high density of faults in this area, as can be seen in the seismic hazard map (Figure 13). Besides all the natural catastrophes, the human-caused disaster of the Iran-Iraq war incurred substantial damages to the province, and many cities including Sarpol Zahab almost completely got ruined during the war which lasted eight years from 1980-1988.

The Iraqi military was employed in broad chemical weapon assaults against the Iranian army and innocent people of border cities and towns. “More than thirty chemical attacks Iranian Kurdish residential areas occurred sometime affecting 20 or more villagers in each attack many Kurdish civilians died in these attacks, and thousands more still suffer horribly from the effects of exposure to the chemical agents.”⁷

After any kind of human-caused or natural disaster, different types of reports launch. One of them is just some numbers about the disaster’s statistics and the victims it has taken. The other one is the photos that I believe can tell the whole story without any words and explanations, but the most effective one is to visit the place anytime after the disaster.

On the last dreadful disaster of Kermanshah province, the 2017 earthquake, I visited there, and now I am going to explain it in words, numbers, and photos.

⁶ Osborne, James F. *Approaching Monumentality in Archaeology*. (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 123–124. ISBN 9781438453255.

⁷ Yildiz, Kerim and Tayşi, Tanyel B. *The Kurds in Iran : the Past, Present and Future*. (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 27.

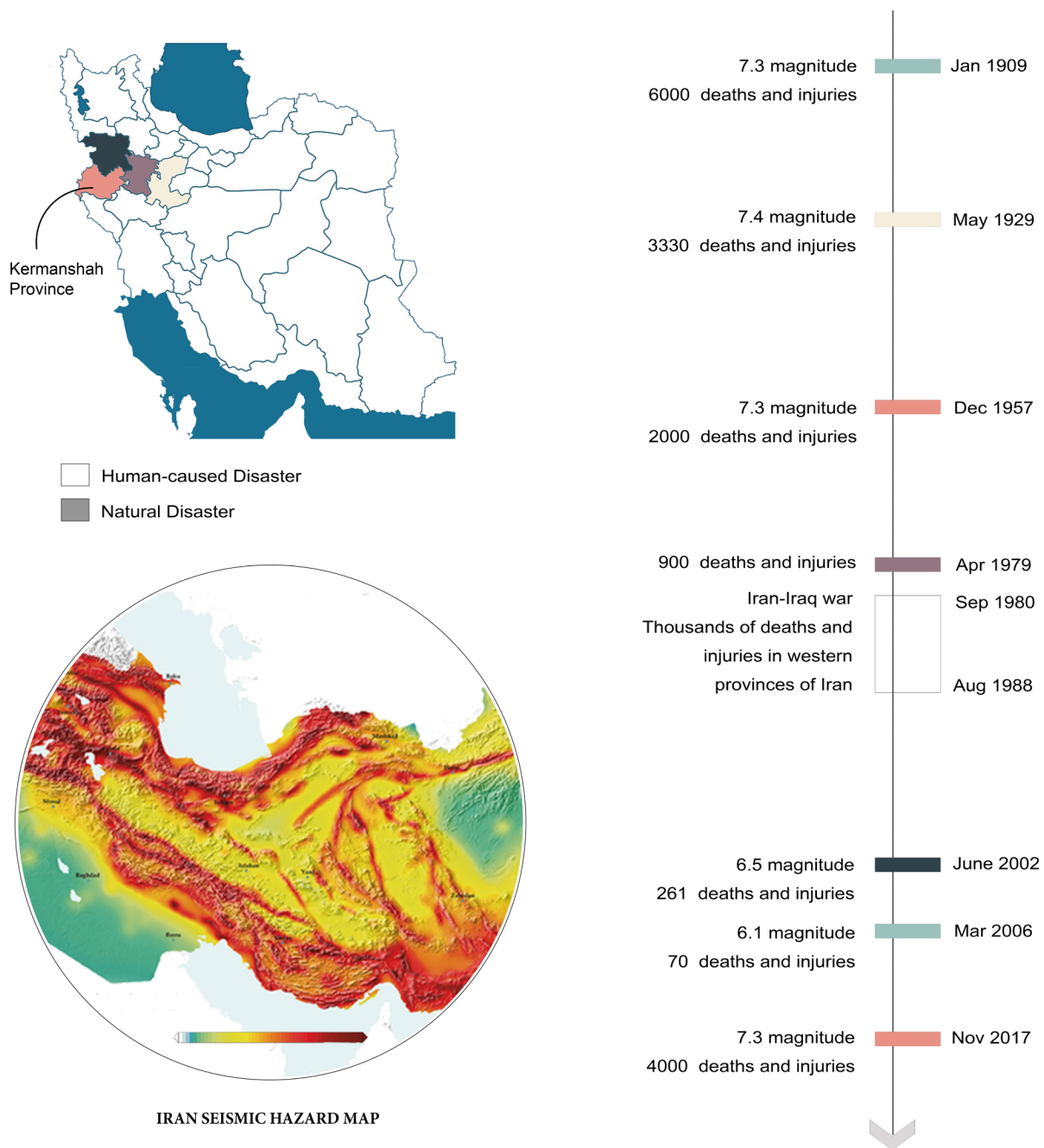


Figure 13 Disaster's Timeline in Western Part of Iran in the last century

THE EARTHQUAKE



Figure 14 November 14th, 2017

The City

The earthquake happened at 9:48 on the night of November 12th, with the moment magnitude of 7.3 lasted around 16 seconds but changed many people's lives forever.

In Sarpol Zahab, the hardest-hit among other cities and villages in Iran ⁸, many public service buildings are ruined, including the principal mosque, the only library, and guest house, and the most painful of all was the hospital. Most of the six-story social housing complexes were ruined as a result of the weak structure.

There are different stages when we face a disaster, and each phase can help to mediate the damages and loss of the painful tragedy.⁹ Mitigation and preparedness are never considered in a third-world country like Iran, but the despondent fact is that even the response phase has never been operated in a quick, convenient, and supportive way from the people in power in my country.

⁸ "A 7.3-magnitude earthquake on the Iran-Iraq border leaves hundreds dead". The Economist. Accessed October 6, 2019. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2017/11/13/a-73-magnitude-earthquake-on-the-iran-iraq-border-leaves-hundreds-dead>

⁹ Nappi, Manuela Marques Lalane, and João Carlos Souza. "Disaster Management: Hierarchical Structuring Criteria for Selection and Location of Temporary Shelters." *Natural Hazards* 75, no. 3 (February 2015): 2421–2436.



A day after earthquake



One month after earthquake



One year after earthquake



Two years after earthquake

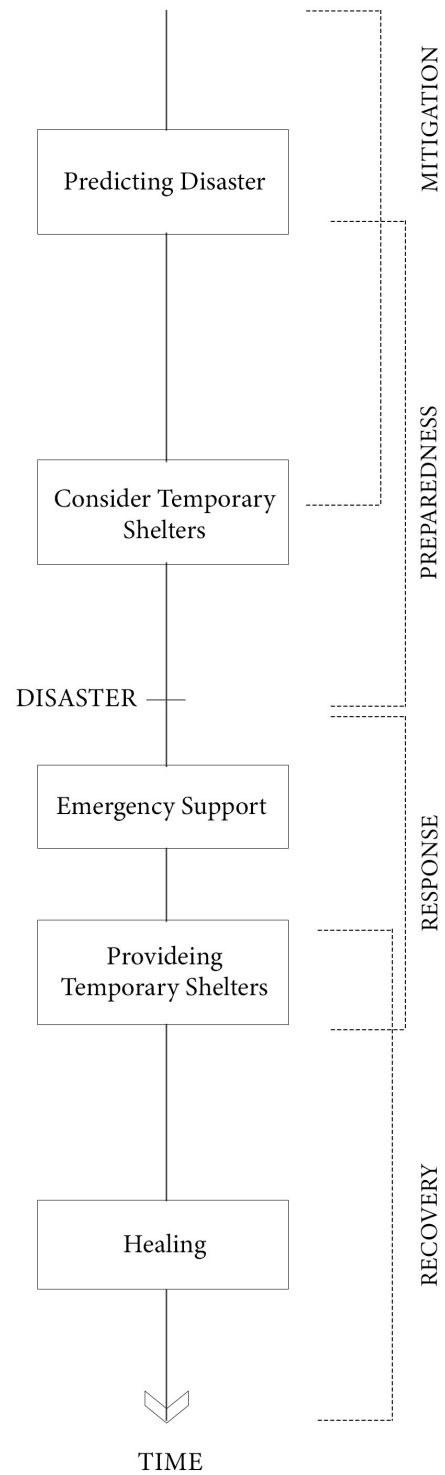


Figure 15 Different Stages in a Disaster

In the 2017 earthquake, the emergency help arrived at Sarpol Zahab after several hours of delay, which took so many other people's lives who were trapped under the ruined buildings. The significant aid that the earthquake's victims received came from other people coming and visiting from all over the country, and this the reason why after two years, when I visited Sarpol Zahab in January 2020, I believe that the city is still in the response mode, and the damages of the earthquake can yet be seen all over the town.

The Women

This part, which is about people's experiences after the earthquake, is a complete observative report based on the interviews my friends and I had during our various visits to the city. We spent time talking to people, hearing their stories, and sometimes just trying to assure them that we are there to help them, as many of them, especially women, were not comfortable to talk about their problems to strangers. As different types of people shared their experiences, I started realizing that



Figure 16 A woman who lost the man of her family

between all of them, women who had lost the man of their family were in most affliction, stress, and danger. And I could feel the anxiety in their voice and could see it in their eyes.

These females felt physically and mentally insecure and vulnerable to various anxieties; Being unemployed with no income to support their families, trying to build up a temporary accommodation from the ruined building materials, and more human-related post-disaster hazards such as robbery, verbal and physical harassment are the examples of their physical concern.



Figure 17 A woman who lost the man of her family; Gathering construction materials trying to build a more stable place to live for their children and keep them warm from the cold nights...



Figure 18 A woman who lost the man of her family; Trying to use her handcraft skill to make some money to support her family...



Figure 19 A woman who lost the man of her family

In terms of the psychological anguishes, the most basic one which can lead to all other problems is losing the sense of identity. Many of these women coming from the Persian culture and raising in a small city by a society and a family with low levels of literacy, are identified by a man in their family. So losing that male in the earthquake, cause them self-doubts and low confidence.

But above all, what made me more concerned about their issue was that I asked many of them this question; what is your one particular dream that is looking forward to it? And none of the answers were related to their own future as an individual human being. Besides all the pains they have been through, the only thing that they still care was their family, especially their children.

THE WOMEN

*A strong woman is a woman bleeding inside
A strong woman is a woman making herself strong
every morning while her teeth loosen and her back throbs
A strong woman is a mass of scar tissue that aches
Strong is what we make each other
Until we are all strong together
A strong woman is a woman strongly afraid*

- Merge Piercy, "For Strong Women"

Persian Culture

Different societies encompass various cultures or, in other words, ways of living, customary beliefs, and social behavior, and when culture affiliates with gender, new types of mindsets are born within each specific gender. Aside from all the distinctions in different cultures, generally, women experience more bounded essence than men. Through timidity, doubt, and reluctance, women often seek physical interaction through things. Women usually lack full faith in their bodies to get them to their goals. On the one hand, women lose trust in being able to do what needs to be done. On the other hand, it is the fear of getting injured, which is a more feminine apprehension than a masculine one.¹⁰ Women's bodies are inherently cultural objects, and whatever function anatomy and biology have, they often communicate with culture, but in some instances, culture and religion have a direct influence on women's bodies via various patterns such as clothing, which sometimes have adverse effects on women's rights to the community.¹¹

Women in Iran are brought up with a kind of culture that inflicts more mental and physical restrictions than Western culture. The advent of Islam in Iran was another critical reason for more limitations imposed on women's behavior, actions, and even their way of clothing in the society.¹² But the most important reason that has an abundance impact on women's constraints is the patriarchal system all throughout Persian history. The dominance of men over women has rooted so deeply in people's beliefs, customs, and lifestyles that most people hardly recognize how entrenched it is. As a result, the lifestyle of many Iranian women not only is completely adapted to the patriarchal system but also in some ways they have been persuaded to believe in it.

10 Iris Marion Young 1949-, *On Female Body Experience : "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*, ed. Oxford University Press. (New York; New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

11 Karen M. Morin and Jeanne Kay Guelke, *Women, Religion, & Space: Global Perspectives on Gender and Faith*, 1st ed. ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 42.

12 Nashat, Guity, and Lois Beck. 2003. *Women in Iran from the rise of Islam to 1800*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. <http://books.google.com/books?id=MmraAAAAMAAJ>.



Figure 20 Persian women's costume through time. The one bright point in all these costumes is how they are designed to show the least part of the women's body to the outer world, and the only elements in their clothing that represent a part of their inner nature are the beautiful textures and colors.

Persian History

"In earlier times, there was a feeling of awesomeness toward women. When the body of the woman was the equivalent of the body of the Goddess, a woman was the container for the miracle of life."¹³ In ancient times, maybe more than 10,000 BC, women had an honorable position and were equal to men in all aspects of life. At that time in Iran, the woman cooperated with the man both at home and outside the home, and on the other hand, she was responsible for the natural reproduction and continuation of the offspring. But the passage of time and the fear of men over women's excessive power caused the social status of Iranian women to change and go downhill.¹⁴

Persian literature and mythology have pushed this female descent and praised the patriarchy over the thousand years of history. In Persian mythology, we can see really few myths in which the main protagonist is a woman, and even in those, the women's faith highly depends on a man and his power, or in many cases, their life has changed because of a man's interference.

One of the critical parts of Persian literature is the ancient love stories that have been told generation by generation in our traditional gatherings, and through time by the repetition of these stories, they became the dream of many little girls growing up hearing them. In most of these stories, the protagonist is a man who has been adored not only for his role as a powerful king and warrior but also for his masculine beauty, and on the other hand, the female part is often just being praised by her appearance and beauty.¹⁵

¹³ Murdock, Maureen. *The heroine's journey*. Boston, Mass: Shambhala (1990), 111.

¹⁴ Sanjari, Saeedeh. [نقش زن در ادبیات کهن و اسطوره های ایرانی] *The role of women in ancient Persian literature and myths*. *Woman and Culture Journal*, Volume 7 (2011).

¹⁵ Musharraf, Maryam. *Love and Chivalry in Persian Old Stories*. *Elixir Literature* 105 (2017) 46175-46181.



Figure 21 The Tradition of telling stories in gatherings. Little girls started picturing those words in the stories and dreaming about the male protagonists.

Many of those Iranian girls growing up with the dream of a prince coming to rescue them, step into early marriages, and soon discover that all those childhood stories were some fairy tales to entertain them and the reality has a different face.

Most of those ancient love stories have emerged from the Kurdish ethnicity occupied in the western part of Iran, including Kermanshah province, and there are three main reasons for that;

The first is that Kurdish men are real warriors and used to tell stories about their bravery and power. It is the norm between Kurdish people to call an unknown person on the street “Pahlevan,” which means hero. The second reason is that Kurdish women are well known for their beauty which became the pretext to many poets and writers to base their love stories in the region.

The third reason is related to the geographical features of this area, covered with the beautiful mountains of Zagros and plenty of waterfalls, vast green plains, and oak forests.

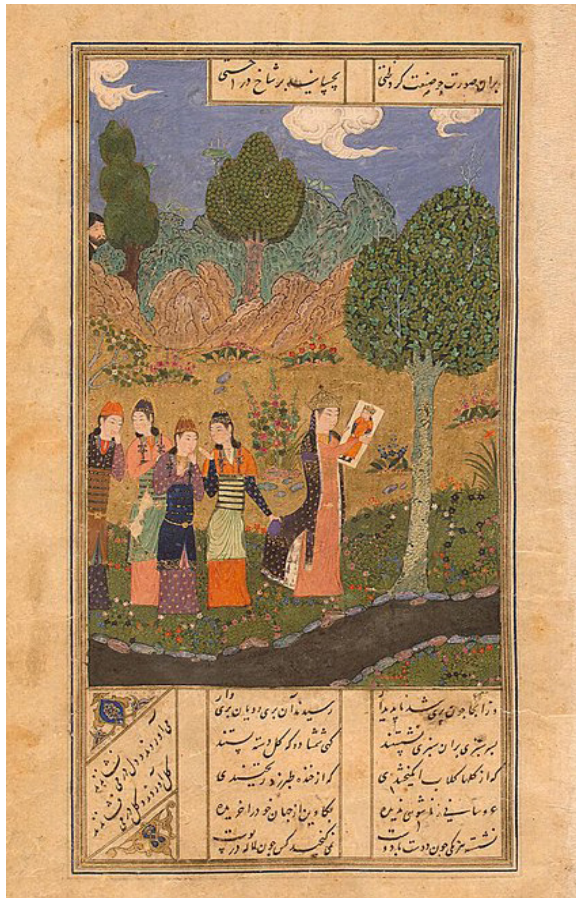


Figure 22 Khosrow and Shirin by Nizami Ganjavi



Figure 23 Shahmaran Myth

The two pictures above are two famous stories in Kurdish culture. The left one is the love story of Khosrow and Shirin. Shirin, a beautiful princess, fell in love with Khosrow, the Persian king, from his picture at first sight. The right one is the story of a mystical creature half-woman and half-snake, which symbolizes wisdom and healing in the Kurdish myth. She fell in love with a human and sacrifices herself because of his love.

With all being said, little Kurdish girls more than any other Iranian girl grow up dreaming about those love fairy tales, and soon many of them realize the truth. Experiencing such painful catastrophes in their lives makes them attach to those myths more than before.

“The reality of our time in history requires that we reverse the pattern of the fairytales. We must go back, restore and heal these female constellations in order to renew and integrate the suppressed masculine element.”¹⁶

16 Kolbenschlag, Madonna. 1988. *Kiss sleeping beauty good-bye: breaking the spell of feminine myths and models*. San Francisco: Harper & Row

Persian Architecture

The fact that men and women have differences in their physical and reproductive roles is undeniable, and these differences even become more vital in the incentives that gender participants should have, the activities in which they should participate, or the spaces where they should socialize and communicate with others.¹⁷

The design of the public and social spaces plays a vital role in providing a safe environment where no gender discrimination can be seen. In smaller cities in Iran, like Sarpol Zahab, there are not so many social spaces for people to gather. As few as those such as tea houses or the zurkhāneh, the traditional gymnasium, have a masculine architecture.¹⁸ Male is the only gender allowed in these spaces, and it is not socially and culturally acceptable for a woman to go to a tea house for drinking tea or spending time. So, if a woman tries to ignore all the customs and beliefs and just enter a teahouse by herself or as a group of women to enjoy the space, she will soon feel uncomfortable and unsafe. If a man accompanies her, it is more acceptable and understandable, and these spaces with the unpleasant feelings to convey to women constitute many of the public spaces in Iran's rural areas.

The primary reason for women's weakness in playing an active part of the society and participating in social gatherings in Iran, mostly in rural areas, is that most of them don't have a job, so they spend most of their time at home. This has shaped the type of activities they usually do, more of inside activities such as baking bread and weaving carpet.

Persian women have never learnt how to share their experiences and feelings with others, first because they always put everyone else's needs and desires in priority to themselves, and the second reason is the lack of social space where they can gather and spend some quality of time with other women and just talk their self out. There were a few gathering places for women in the past, including hammams and the typical Persian house, the design of which has provided various get-together spaces with different privacies, but not anymore as people moved to modern apartments with a private bath to themselves.

The architecture of the Persian house was designed for women as they spent most of their time there. The first primary feature of this typical house is the courtyard, an open space usually integrated with water and plants, in the heart of the home surrounded by the building that makes it a private space against the outer world. But when it gets to guests and visitors of the house, the courtyard played a semi-private space comparing to the interior. The other notable design aspect of this typical house is the hierarchy through various areas, and the way to achieve this hierarchy is either the openness or the difference in height. (Figure 24)

17 L. McDowell, *Towards an Understanding of the Gender Division of Urban Space*, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 1, no. 1 (1983), 59-72. doi:10.1068/d010059.

18 Friedl, Erika. *The Women of Deh Koh : Lives in an Iranian Village*. Washington :Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.



Figure 24 The traditional typology of the Persian house

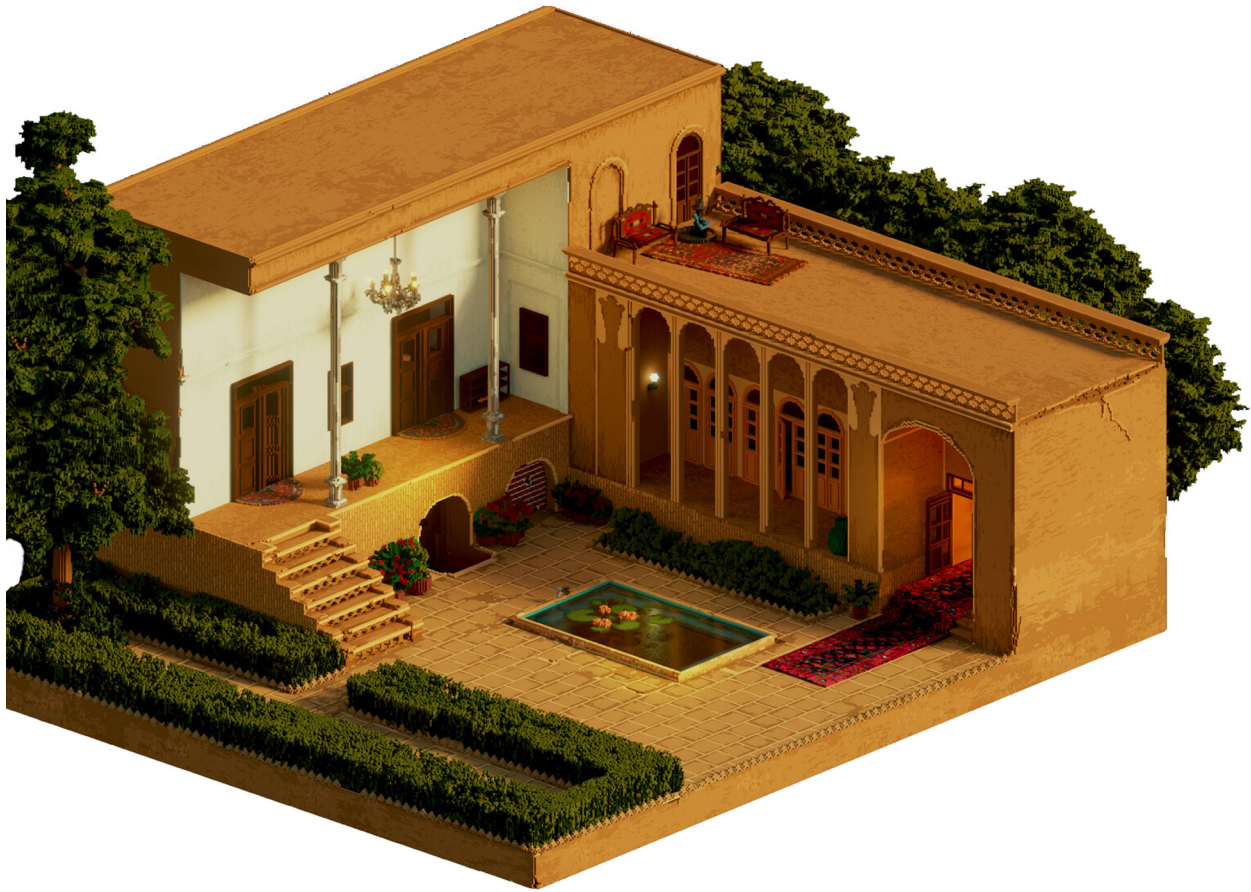


Figure 26 Fraction of a 3D model of the typical Persian house

As we can see in figure 24, the sequence starts from the open space, then entering the house in a closed or semi-closed area as an arctic entry, then again an open space of the courtyard, after that a semi-open porch, and at the end the interior with the highest level of privacy.

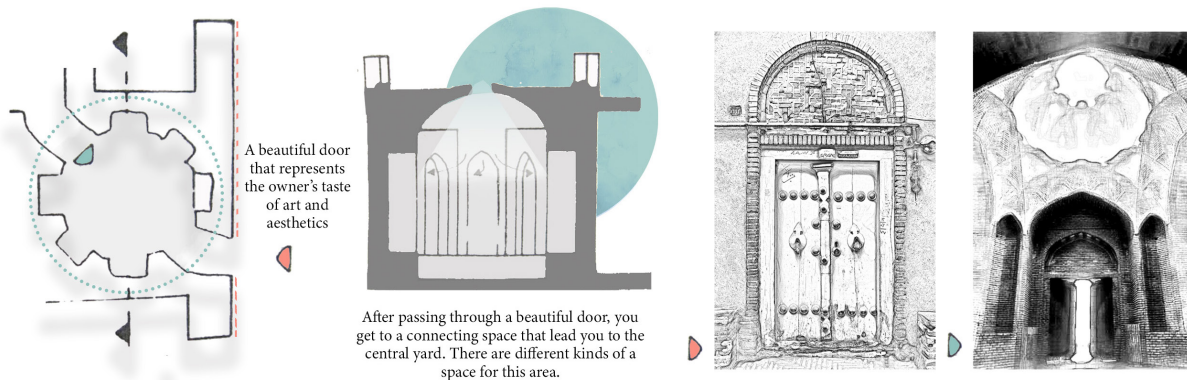


Figure 25 The Entrance in Persian House

The interesting point is that as soon as entering the closed interior space, there is no hierarchy, and all rooms are connected. Another important aspect is that roof was also occupied for various activities such as drying fruits or even sleeping in warm seasons.

When I think about the Persian house's whole idea, I see the same characteristics of a Persian woman. When you look at it from outside, you can just see a door and nothing from inside, but when you pass through that door, and some kind of semi-closed vestibule, you get to see the true beauty of the house. The levels of privacy in a Persian house is similar to that of a Persian woman. They are beautiful inside, and they keep everything hidden from all the beauties to the pains and hardships they have experienced all their lives. They need to be in a place where they can open themselves up and let all the pain come out, and that is how their inner nature heals.



Figure 27 A beautiful door to an abandoned Persian house.

*Show your scars.
Show them your scars,
so they know it's okay if they also have a few.
Show them your truth
So they can stop hiding their pain.
Share your stories
So they remember that wisdom can grow
from the places they once fell.
Healing comes from wholeness
Help them find theirs by standing in yours.
Share your stories and tell of your healing
You never know your moment of vulnerability
might help another soul free.*

-Cristen Rodgers

THE CENTER

Five months after my visit to Sarpol Zahab in 2017, I got accepted for the master of architecture at the University of Waterloo, and I knew from the very first moment that I'm going to work on an architecture for wounded women of Sarpol Zahab. I believe that architecture has a chief effect not only on people's everyday feelings but also on more deep-rooted emotions.

Concept

The state of mind where these wounded women need to get is being in complete peace with themselves, and finding a deep relief from all the pain they have experienced in their entire life, which is not limited just to the earthquake. Achieving that Special feeling of peace is not something that could happen in a moment, it takes time, and the path to get there is what I call healing.

Healing is a journey in life, and what I learned from all the resources I read about this Heroine's journey¹⁹ and experiencing my own in the last six months, is that like any other actual trip you don't want to take alone and having companies of people who share the same pain, anxieties and wishes can have a positive effect in the whole process of healing.

Getting to this point, being aware of women's mental and physical desires in Sarpol Zahab, I realized what these women need is a peaceful space where they can spend time and talk to other women who have the same experiences and pains to share. The reason is that I believe this is the best



Figure 28 Kurdish women gathering, baking bread and sharing stories

19 Murdock, Maureen. 1990. *The heroine's journey*. Boston, Mass: Shambhala.

therapy that a woman with my culture and with all the psychological and physical constraints, can receive.

Site Location

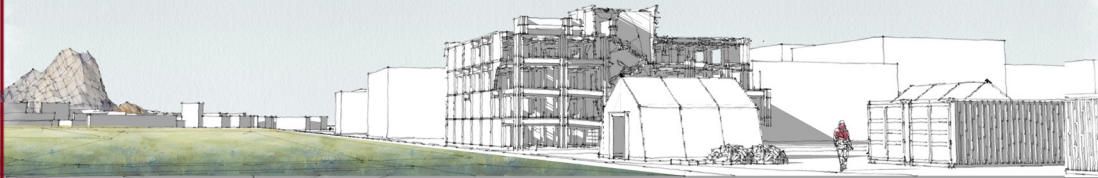
The location I chose for the site is the edge where the city ends, the astonishing landscape starts, the river goes through, and there is a mountain to lean on. Standing on this edge is like living in the present time, looking to the past through the gap between the ancient rocks, and having the view of the infinite pure nature on the other side is like looking at the future that hasn't come yet. When I was there, walking in that location, I felt a kind of peace. It was far enough from the city's tension and pain but also not so far to feel completely disconnected.

The other reason that I believed this location is the best place for a community center is that getting there is like a beautiful journey through the city. This short walk that lasts between 10-40 minutes depending on where these women live, starts from their home, then they cross the bazaar as the heart of the town, passing by the historical rock relief, and finally passing through the existing



Figure 29 Site Location

The journey to the centre starts from their home,
that of many don't have a proper one
and still live in tents and conex boxes...



Their journey
will continue
through the
street
bazaar...



and eventually after passing the Anubanini rock, reminding them
of their long beautiful history, they get to the bridge where they
can see the site and the pure nature in its background...

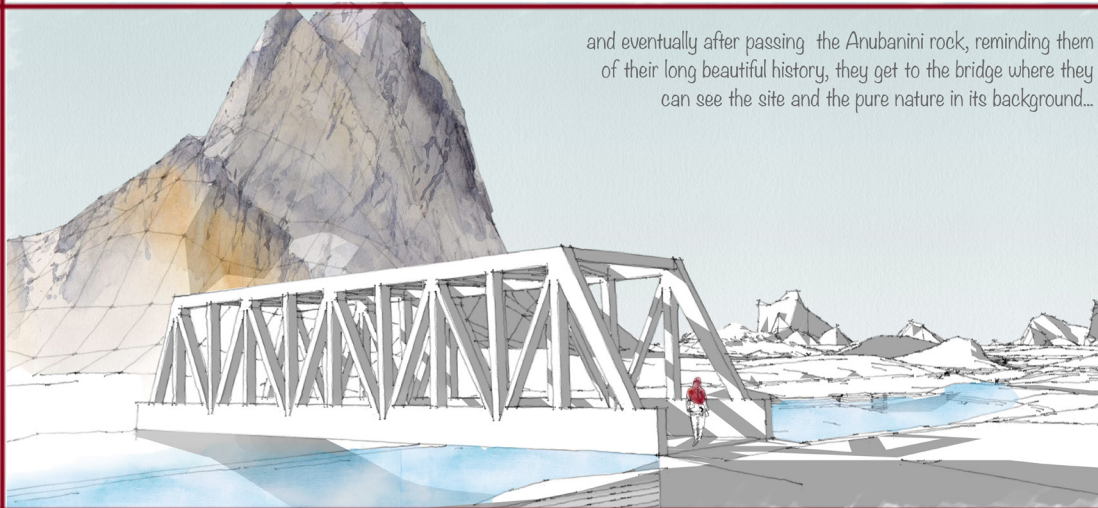


Figure 30 The healing journey through the city

bridge to get to the site with having a glimpse of the Sarpol mountain the whole path.

After their journey through the city, the women arrive at a beautiful vast plain with the river on the right, and the mountain on the left side. Based on the Persian mythology, water is a symbol of Healing and Purity, and Anahita is the ancient Persian goddess of fertility, water, healing, and wisdom²⁰.

On the other side, the mountain is a symbol of sacredness and the connection between the Earth and the Sky. Many sacred creatures lived in the mountains, such as the mythical bird called the Simurgh, which symbolizes healing in Persian culture²¹. Besides, there are many Persian stories in



Figure 31 Concept Drawing. Showing the Simurgh on the left, on the slopes of the mountain, and the goddess Anahita on the right, in the waters of the river.

20 "Anahita", Ancient History Encyclopedia, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://www.ancient.eu/Anahita/?fbclid=IwAR0g8eRqTBHzqT5YfcEh6pUfDEqktGxHf5FQcXjKeRJqnrBR9mLHJxAAiEU>

21 "Simurgh, the Mysterious Giant Healing Bird in Iranian Mythology", The Ancient Origins, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://members.ancient-origins.net/articles/simurgh-mysterious-giant-healing-bird-iranian-mythology>

which human beings experienced spiritual connections with the divine in the mountains, as it is a place closer to the sky.

Healing is a journey, and women take the first part of this metaphorical path through the city getting to the site, and this path continues inside the project.

Site Plan

The site plan shows how the whole building mass is located in a relationship with the Sarpol mountain, the Piran river, and looking at the city through the gap between the two outcrops of rock. Two paths connect the building to the site, the south one is a pedestrian path passing along the river to the main entrance, and the north road is the driveway for those who want to drive to the center. There is another pedestrian path on the other side of the river for people passing by. (Figure 33)

The first step in designing the project was to create the healing path in continuity with the city journey to the main entrance. Regarding the site, two axes reside here: one is a horizontal one, which is the healing axis, which connects the water to the mountain, and the second is the time axis, considering the city to represent their history, and the landscape as their future. So the healing path is designed in the same direction with the healing axis with a little rotation toward the future, starting from the river rising to the mountain and meeting the oak tree. (Figure 34)

The tree is oak, which is the primary plant species in this region, and people there feel kind of sacredness toward it and look at it as a symbol of strength and durability.



Figure 32 Gathering around the oak tree: To protect it from getting cut down



Figure 33 Site Plan



Figure 34 Design Diagram. The two axes of time and healing, and the healing path inside the center connecting river to the mountain.

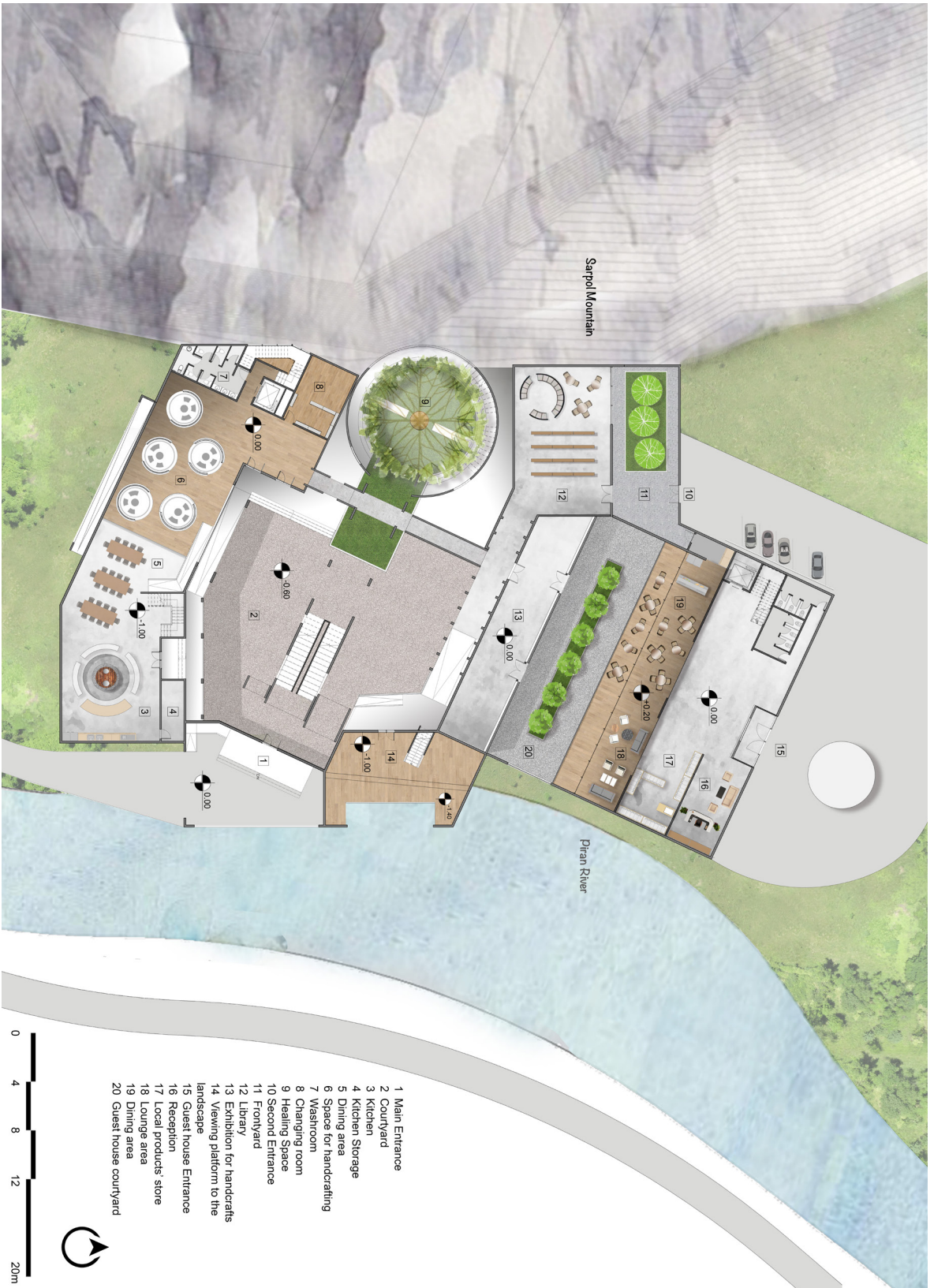


Figure 35 Ground Floor Plan

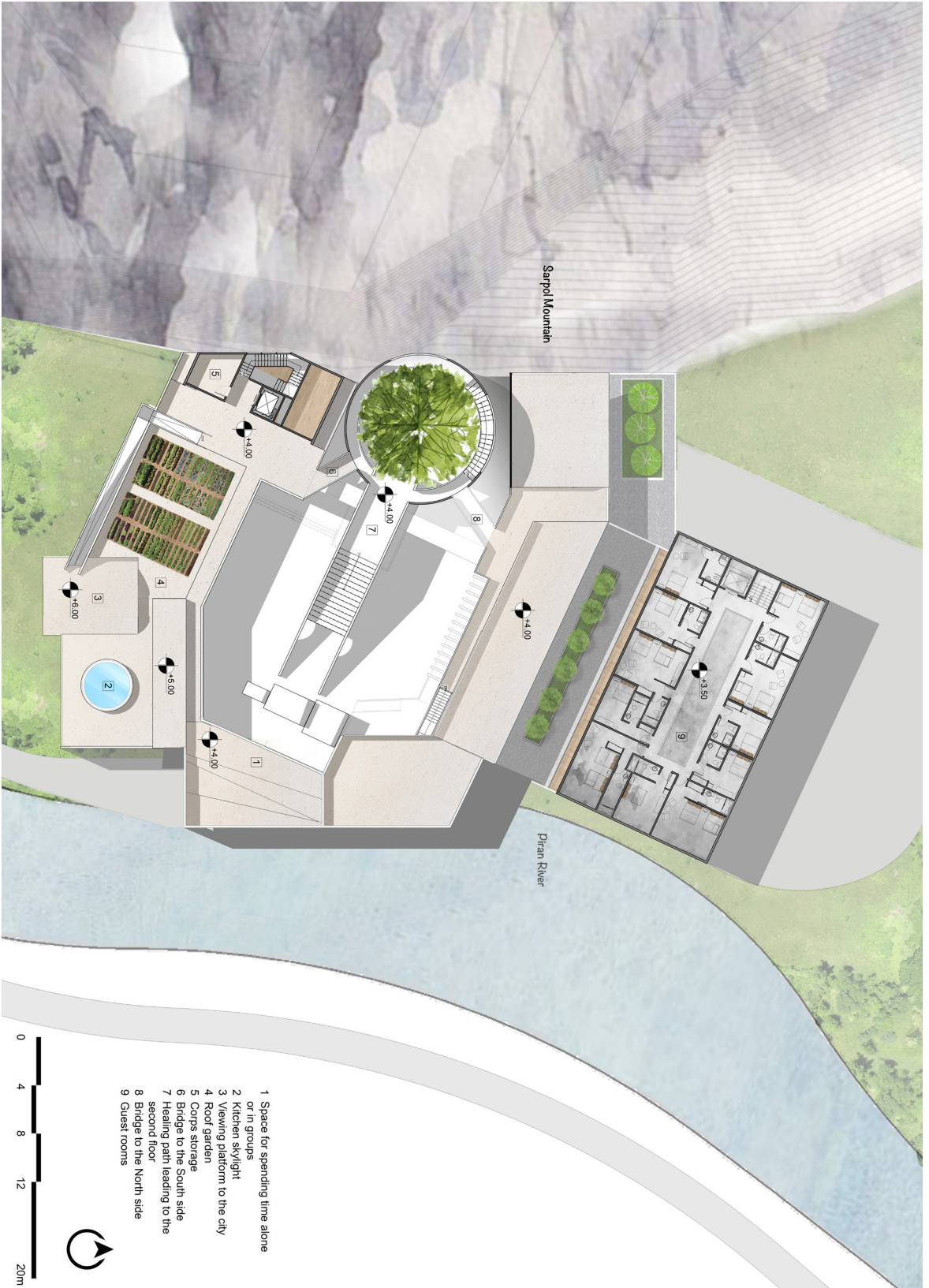


Figure 36 Second Floor Plan

Program

This community centre or what I like to call the healing centre is a place exclusively designed for women to spend time together, as there has never been such a place for them in Persian culture. Nor Persian House, neither the traditional hammams were designed for gathering, but their spacial qualities provided the environment for Persian women to feel safe and comfortable enough to spend some time together.

The project is designed as a of community centre with various purposes; the primary one is to give these women different qualitative spaces to allocate some time to themselves in peace and without any stress, and gather with other females with the same experiences to share. The other purpose was to provide a place where they can do different kinds of craftsart, teach their particular skills to others, learn from them, and also earn money through exhibiting their artwork.

The project includes a kitchen through which the women can cook food to be distributed all over the city for the people in need. Along with all different activities and particular spaces for each activity, there is also an open space designed for the children of women who are afraid of leaving them alone at home.

The healing path which connects the river to the mountain as the two symbols of healing in Persian beliefs, ends up to this circular space with a beautiful oak tree in the middle where women can sit around, talk to each other, meditate, read books, or just spend some quality of time under



Figure 37 The Healing Path. This is the view right after entering the center, facing three arches with different heights, as a metaphor for the Persian house's semi-closed vestibule. Through the gap in the stairs, the end of the healing path can be seen with the mountain rock in the Oak tree's background.

the shadow of this mystical tree. (Figure 39)

The shape of the circle conveys the feeling of infinity, unity, and strength, so I used it in various horizontal forms as gathering spaces and in vertical views as arches in different parts of the design.

The other spaces are located on two sides of this healing path, the ones that are related to these women's past are on the south part, and the ones that could be new experiences are on the north side. Southside, including the kitchen, the dining area, and the space where they can do handicrafts such as weaving carpets, are connected to the north side through a bridge covered with an arched roof.



Figure 38 The bridge connecting two sides

The north side with the library, exhibition for their crafts, and the guest house are spaces where they will experience new activities and earn money. Besides becoming a source of income to those in need, the other reason that I added the guest house is that the only guest house in the city was ruined in the earthquake, so there is no place to stay for people who visit the city. The only connection between the guest house and the center is the exhibition area. The main reason is to provide the privacy women need to feel mentally and physically safe and comfortable enough not to have a hijab.

Both north and south side have a specially designed space just for the women to hang out and have views to the city, as on the southern part, and to the landscape and river, as on the north side.



Figure 39 Healing Space. This is a quiet and intimate semi-open space where women can relax alone or in pairs.



Figure 40 The Healing Path rise up to the second floor, and after here if they want to continue the healing path to the end, they can take the circular stairs to the healing space, or they can choose north and south bridges.



Figure 41 The Courtyard. This is a view of the courtyard underneath the stair, which is mostly going to be occupied with children, playing and using different qualities of space for their various activities.



Figure 42 Section E, this section passes through the healing axis all the way from the river to the mountain.

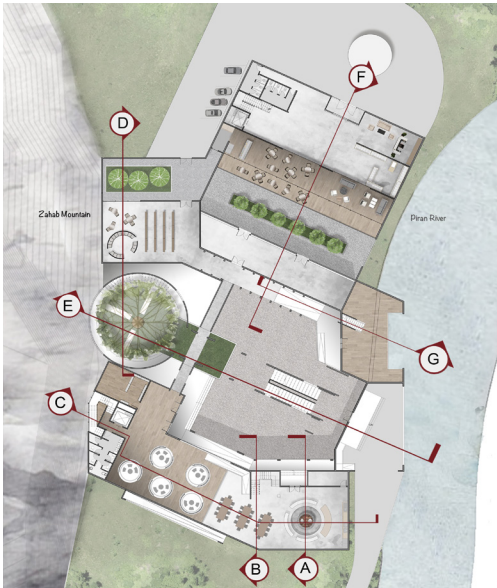
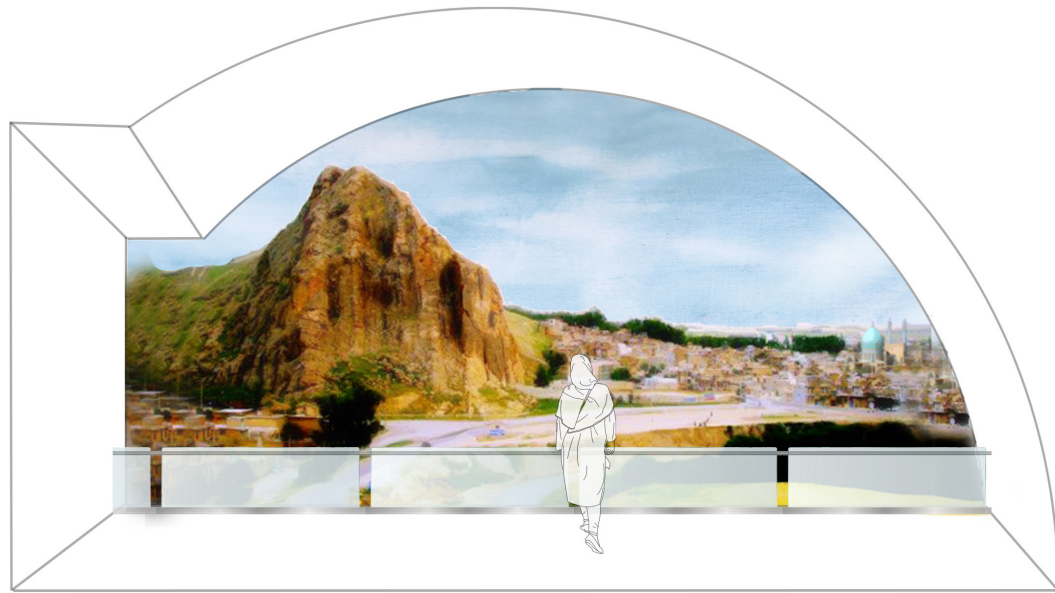




Figure 43 Section A. The kitchen with a hierarchial entrance, leading to a gathering space around a traditional ground oven, and a skylight on top to get a directed light and also used as a smoke ventilator.



Camera A A platform to look back at the city (their past) with monuments of history(Angbannini Rock) and religion(mosque)

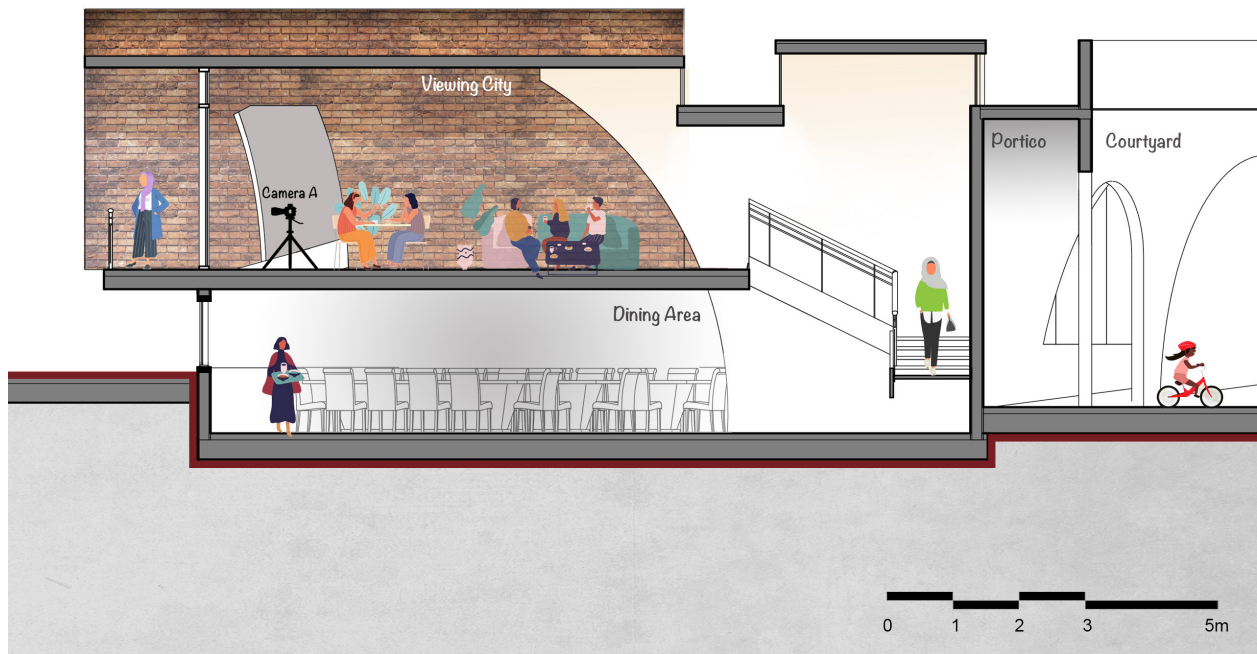


Figure 44 Section B goes through dining area and the gathering space above, with a view to the city or as I say to their past. It is another space for women to spend time together or alone with a beautiful view to the city.

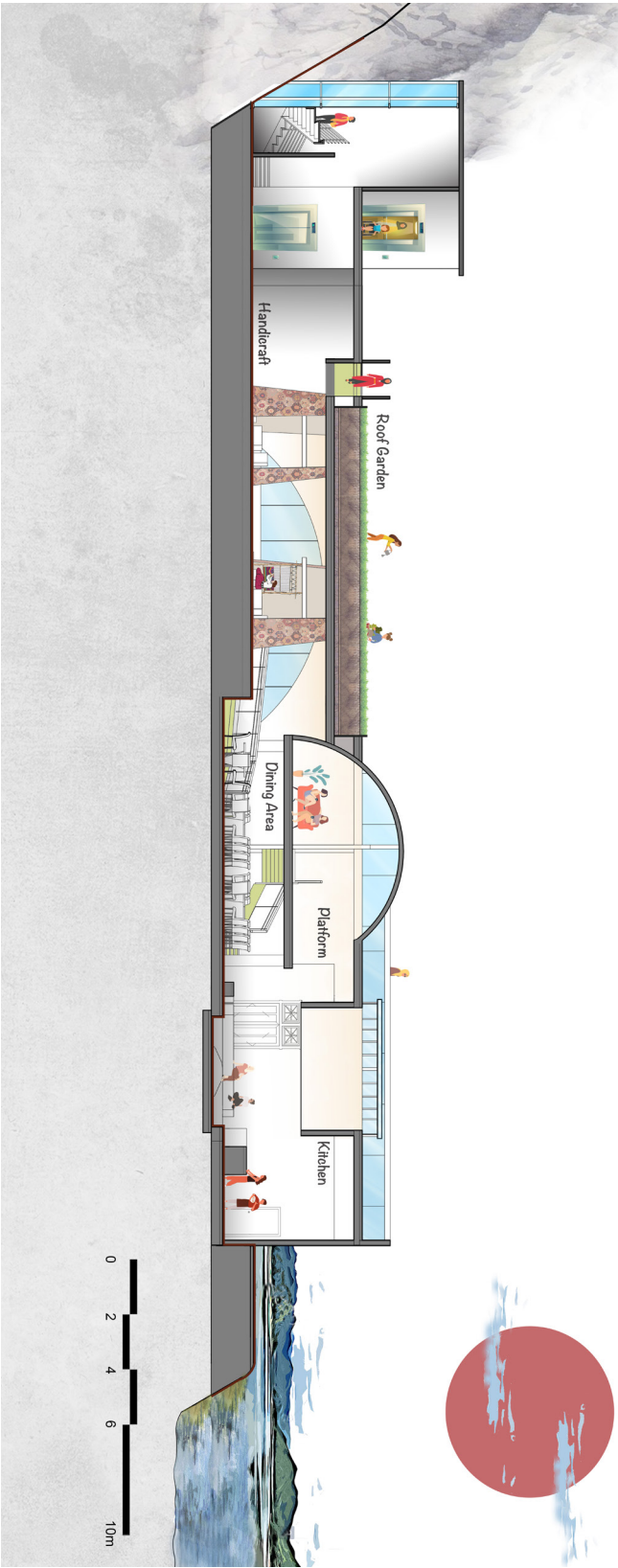


Figure 45 Section C, section of the south side, the kitchen, the dining area, the viewing platform, the space where they can do and teach handcrafts. There is a special structure designed for weaving carpets, with three seats of different heights and a rail that can hold the loom.

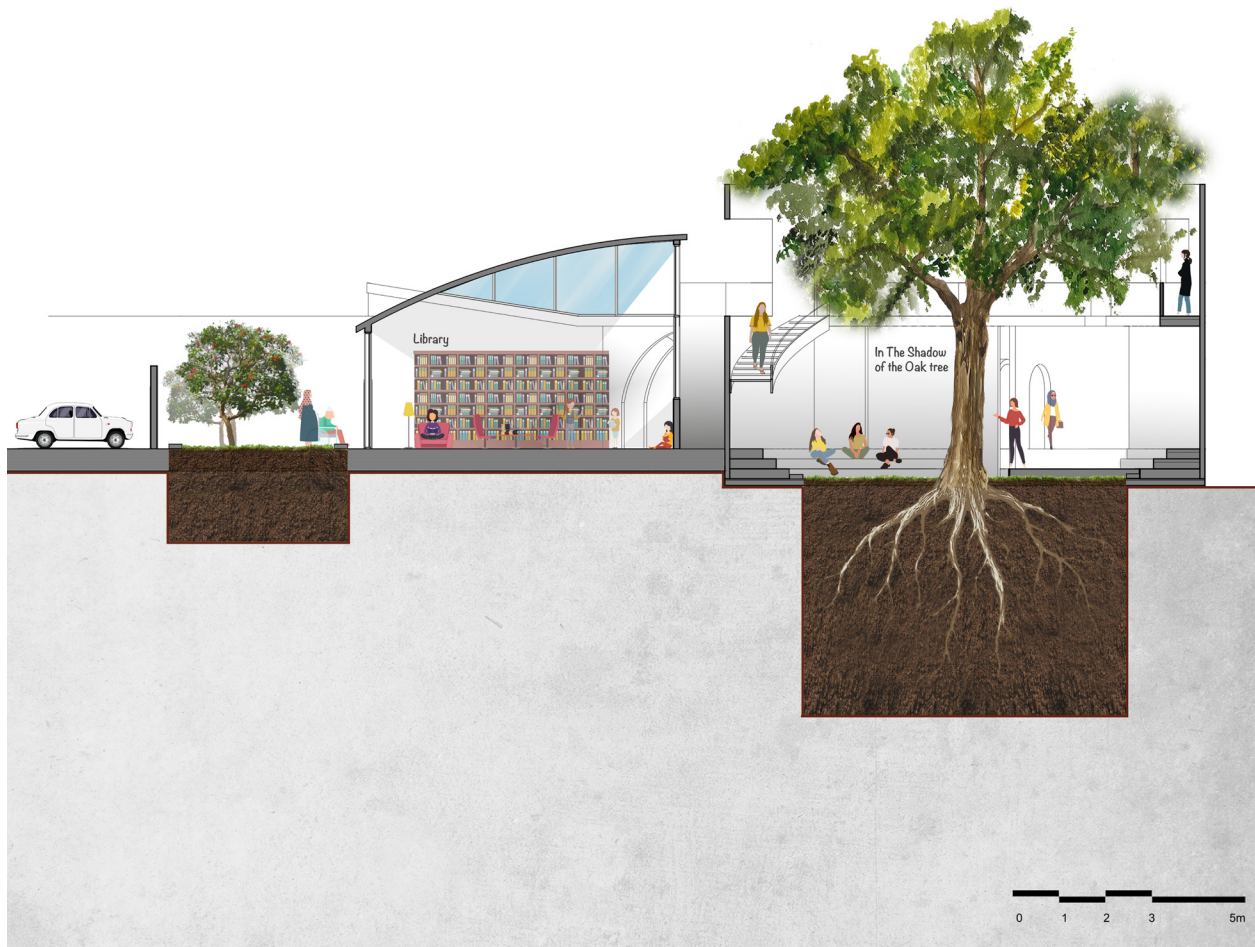


Figure 46 Section D, Section of the library, Including the second entrance which is designed for people who want to drive there. The second entrance also has its own small yard working to keep the hierarchy through spaces.



Figure 47 Section F, Section of the guest house with its own entrance and courtyard, facing the exhibition space where tourists can visit.



Camera B A platform to look at the pure nature ahead, It is beautiful as their future can be...

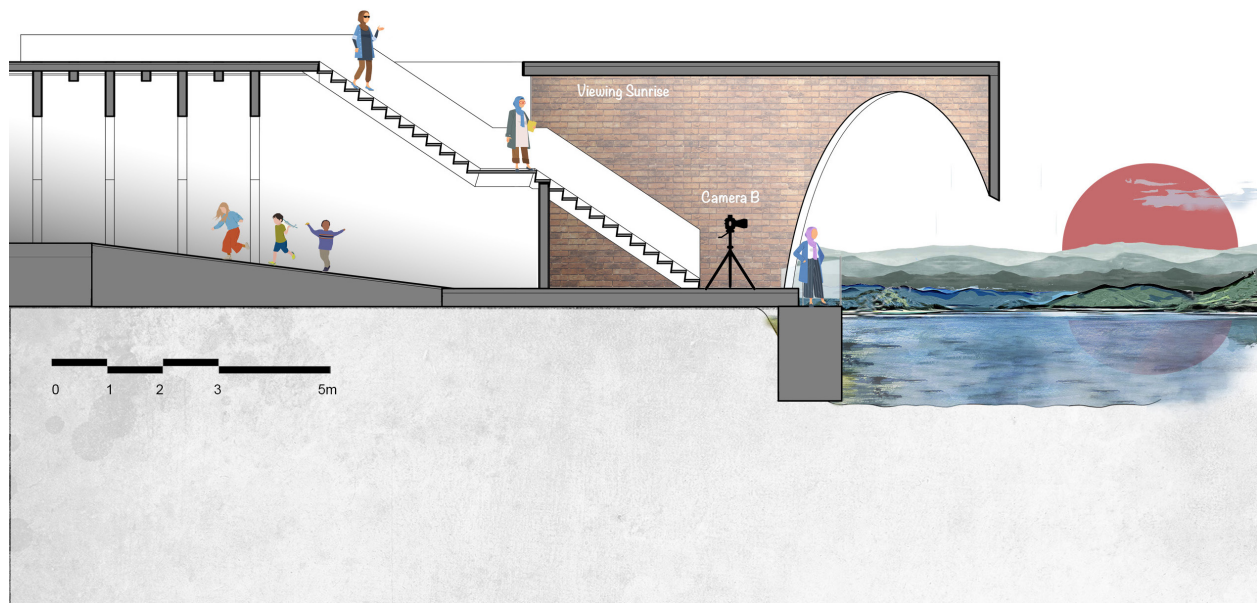


Figure 48 Section G, This is the viewing platform of the north side, stepping down a little bit to get a closer connection with the river and enjoying the view. I also like to call it sunrise platform as they can get the best view of the sunrise from there.

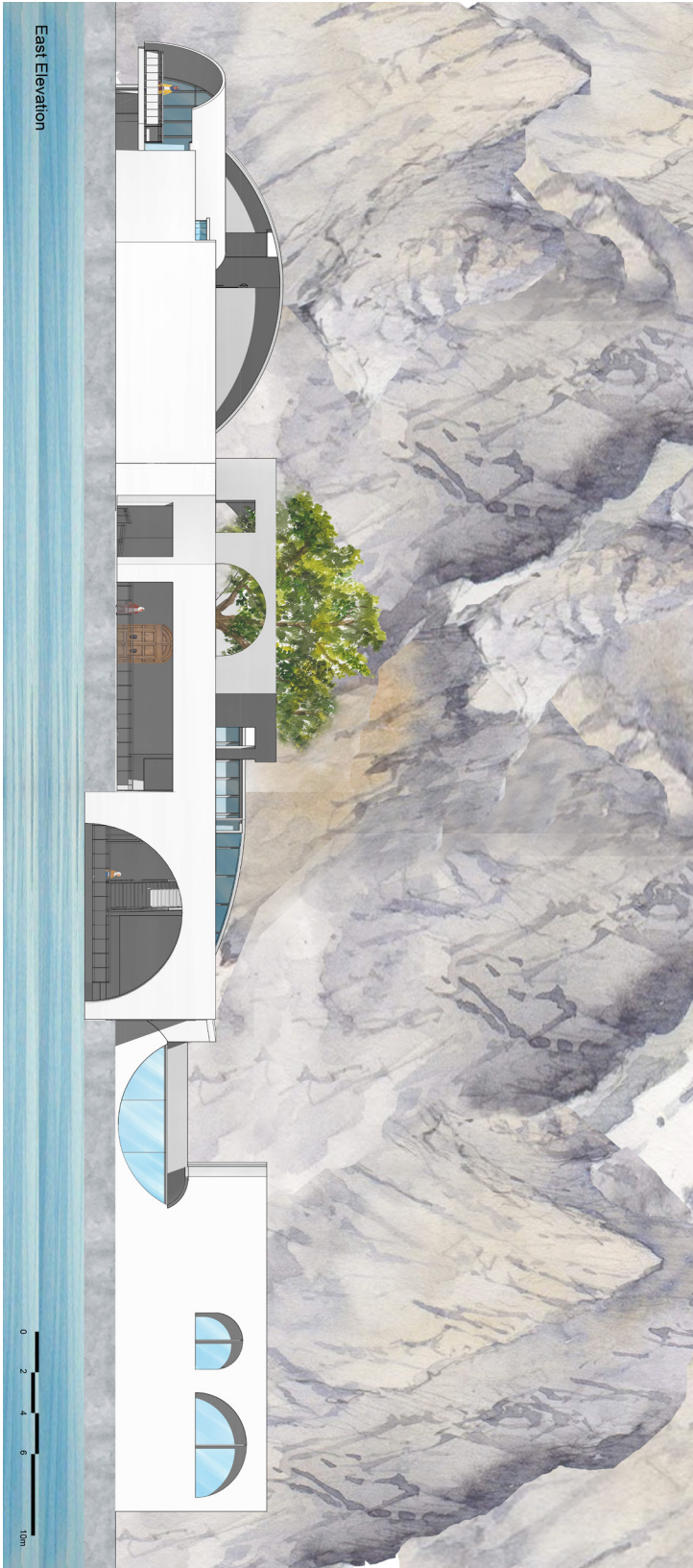


Figure 49 East Elevation

Building Material

All the south and north buildings' structure is brick masonry, which is the local material and also remind these women of the Persian house and the good memories related to that, and the healing path leading to the circular space is in white concrete to take the least attention toward the material and convey the feeling mostly by the light, the mountain in the background and the beautiful oak tree.

The construction budget for this community center is assumed to be supported by individuals who wish to help the Persian women society grow, so the construction costs should be managed to the least amount. The local material in the area is brick, but the unreinforced masonry is not a promising material when it comes to earthquakes. However, there are some passive ways to minimize earthquakes' harm, including structural and formal solutions.

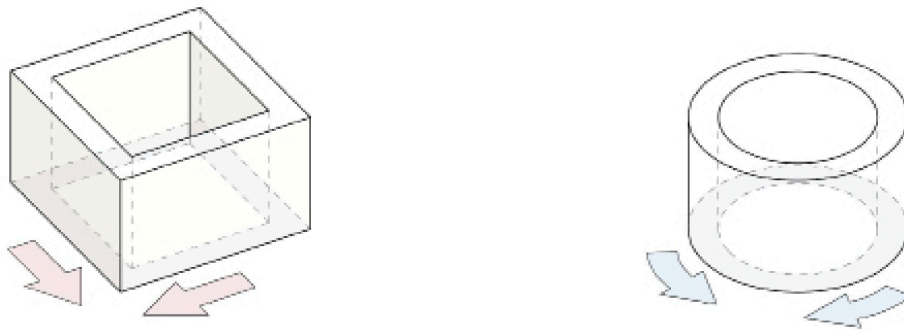


Figure 50 Symmetry as an earthquake-resistant approach

Symmetry in form of the building can increase the structure's stability. The closer the plan is to a circle, the better are its chances at canceling out lateral forces and withstanding them²².

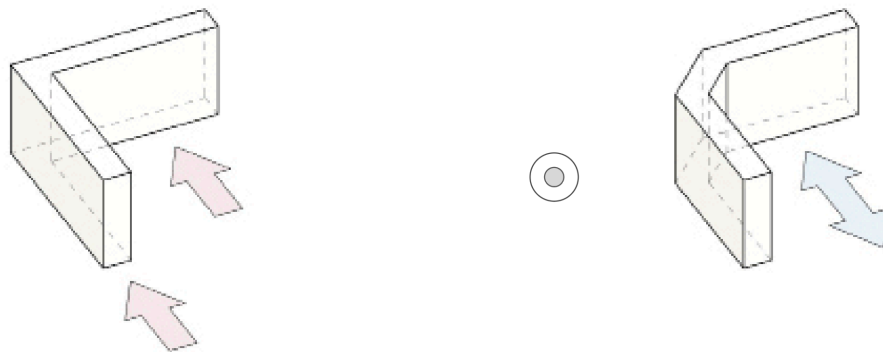


Figure 51 Angle management as an earthquake-resistant approach

²² Gernot Minke, *Building with Earth: Design and Technology of a Sustainable Architecture*, Third and revised edition. ed. (Basel, Switzerland: Birkhäuser, 2013), 136.

Avoiding right angles helps transfer shear forces to adjacent walls and prevent a concentration of stress.²³

There are other structural solutions such as tying the walls to the floor and roof, or installing a steel frame and bolting the wall to it, and many other construction methods that can strengthen the structure. But in this particular project, using the symmetrical shapes and different angles of joining walls in plan (Figure 35), besides being a one story-building can minimize the damage of an earthquake to a great amount.

Another element that has been used in several parts of this project is the barrel vault. “To resist the horizontal seismic movement in these structural elements, the joint between the arch and the pillar must be inclined, and the pillar must have enough width to keep the resultant forces within the central part”.²⁴ Barrel vaults work better than the pointed vault in an earthquake, so all the arches in different parts of this project are barrels (figure 38).

23 Minke, 139.

24 Mahdi, Tarik. “Performance of Traditional Arches and Domes in Recent Iranian Earthquakes.” (2002).

CONCLUSION

Not all Persian women surrender the patriarchy that is governing the society. Many known and unknown individuals fought for their rights, some were killed, some were imprisoned, some had to leave the country to save their lives, and many are still bravely fighting to achieve their goals.

A few of them were my inspiration through this path; Forough Farrokhzad, a poet who had lived for 30 years, used poems to show her objection toward the society that embraced patriarchy. And Shirin Neshat is a successful visual artist, filmmaker, and photographer who has dedicated most of her work in enlightening the path to the Persian women willing to follow her direction. And many other potent women who are eager to fight for their rights and goals.

The idea of a community centre designed exclusively for women to spend some quality time together is a unique concept in Persian society. But I wish this kind of architecture takes place sometime in the future to provide an environment for many of those wounded Persian women who are not aware of their physical and psychological needs, their rights throughout the society, and how they can stand for all their desires and achieve it.

I believe that such cultural and societal transformations need time to be accomplished, and an extremely influential factor is to work on little children, both girls and boys, and this is what happens when women bring their children to this community centre. These young girls and boys will learn the respectful way of behaving the female gender, getting to know their needs and desires, communicating with them properly, recognizing if they are in danger, and some effective ways of helping them in those situations.



Figure 52 February 2018, Children of Sarpol Zahab

PHOTOGRAPHY

All these photos were taken by me in Sarpol Zahab city at different times after the 2017 Kermanshah earthquake. The main reason for including this part is to give the reader a better sense of the living conditions after the earthquake, the feeling of the environment, and mentioning the beautiful landscapes in the background of this wounded city.



Figure 53 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 54 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 55 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 56 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 57 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 58 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 59 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 60 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 61 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 62 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 63 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 64 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake



Figure 65 Sarpol Zahab city after the 2017 earthquake

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